

## **II. Executive Summary**

### **a. Project title and applicant name:**

The Union School Slough Watershed Improvement Program, submitted by the National Audubon Society-California (Audubon-CA) in partnership with the Yolo County Resource Conservation District (RCD) and local landowners.

**b. Project description and primary biological/ecological objectives:** This project is not simply another watershed planning process. Rather, it is a mechanism for coordinating and putting into place restoration practices already identified in the Willow Slough Integrated Resources Management Plan (Yolo RCD, et. al. 1996), of which Union School Slough is a part. The RCD's years of experience working with landowners to develop and implement small-scale, and on-farm restoration projects has demonstrated that even the most committed landowners need technical, practical, and financial assistance to ensure long term success. This project addresses that need by establishing California's first community-based restoration and vegetation management "service" for the sole purpose of assisting landowners with on-the-ground conservation practices. The project is based on a landowner stewardship group that serves as the information-sharing, problem-solving, and "neighbor-convincing" nerve center. Project staff will work with the landowner group and an advisory committee comprised of stakeholder agencies to implement a set of conservation and restoration practices, identify further opportunities and project partners, overcome barriers and constraints, and disseminate technical, practical, and legal information. This watershed model will be replicable throughout the greater Bay-Delta ecosystem.

The proposed activities have been shown to reduce sedimentation and erosion, improve water quality, reduce flooding and increase wildlife habitat. Models for some activities have already been implemented successfully by the RCD and local landowners on a smaller scale. These successes and the technical blueprints for the projects are documented in several recent publications (see Applicant Qualifications, below). Project objectives of the proposed watershed program will include development of a diverse, community based watershed stewardship group that will use resource information to implement ecological solutions. The stewardship group will address program objectives and will develop a mutually beneficial strategy for the balanced implementation of watershed restoration projects.

**c. Approach/tasks/schedule:** The overall approach is to work with landowners, both individually and as a group, to plan, execute, maintain, monitor, and evaluate a set of six or more practices in the watershed. Audubon-CA and the Yolo RCD will provide both institutional and practical/technical support. Staff members and consultants (as needed) will coordinate activities on the ground, with a major emphasis on training landowners in ongoing maintenance to insure long term success. The project team will also coordinate activities with local stakeholder agencies and cost-share programs.

The nine project tasks and their implementation schedules are: 1) Convening a landowner stewardship group and advisory committee (Year 1, ongoing); 2) Landowner training workshops (Year 1: 2 workshops, Year 2: 2 workshops) 3) Upper slough riparian restoration (Year 1: implementation, Year 2,3: ongoing maintenance and evaluation); 4) Upper slough rangeland

restoration (Year 1: implementation; Year 2,3: ongoing maintenance); 5) Construction of hill ponds for wildlife (Year 1: planning, Year 2: construction, Year 3: maintenance and evaluation) 6) Construction of tailwater ponds (5 ponds throughout project term) 7) Revegetation of irrigation canals (Year 1: establishment; Year 2,3: weed control, maintenance, evaluation); 8) Lower slough and floodplain planning and restoration (Year 1,2: Planning, evaluation, coordination; Year 3: Implementation); 9) Project management and administration, reporting, legal compliance (throughout).

**d. Justification for project and CALFED funding:** Union School Slough is a tributary of Willow Slough and, as such, is contained in the Willow Ecological Unit described in the CALFED ERPP (Vol. II, pp. 324-335) which lists implementation objectives, targets and programmatic actions to restore ecological processes. The ERPP (Vol. II, p. 328) also highlights the Willow Slough Integrated Resource Management Plan and the Yolo County RCD's role in its development and implementation.

**e. Budget costs and third party impacts:** Total budget is \$711,592. Third party impacts include changes in flow regimes or land use on properties adjacent to or downstream of those upon which conservation practices are implemented. Conflicts arising from such changes will be minimized through the Landowner Stewardship Group, hydraulic study, and ongoing communication between project staff and landowners not participating in the project. Impacts are expected to be small.

**f. Applicant qualifications:** The RCD has implemented four major demonstration projects since 1995 and provides a network between growers, agencies, and private groups for resolving complex resource and watershed problems. For the past four years, Audubon-CA has been working with the Farm Bureau, landowners, resource agencies and the state legislature to provide incentives for farmers and ranchers to restore habitat. The combination of the RCD's practical experience and local connections and Audubon's legal expertise and statewide network, gives this partnership an unparalleled set of resources.

**g. Monitoring and data evaluation:** Monitoring includes photo point analysis of individual conservation practices, measurement of ecological indicators, automatic stream flow analysis for water quality parameters. Project staff will submit an Ecological and Biological Monitoring Plan and Quality Assurance Project Plan.

**h. Local support/coordination with other programs/compatibility with CALFED objectives:** Five watershed landowners have already signed onto the project and staff will continue outreach through the project term. The RCD has long-standing relationships with important resource agencies as well as individual landowners. The project will dovetail with the RCD's new 319 program to identify and evaluate sites for slough channel enhancement and hill pond construction; and to develop a streamlined permitting process integrated with a restoration strategy